

Grant Continuation Report from Task Force

- Recommendation:**
- Approve continuation at same funding and slots subject to conditions and reassessment in April. Conditions are
 - add a performance measure that captures the students benefitting from out-of-classroom and extended-day programming led by AmeriCorps. This would give the full picture of the effort.
 - return attention to engaging volunteers and meet/set targets for capacity-building. Current efforts are not acceptable.
 - establish community advisory committee as required by regulation.
 - Task Force conduct a six-month performance review in April using quarter report for period ending March 30. Task Force to recommend any needed adjustments to funding and slots at that time. Maintaining continued funding and slots at requested level will depend on performance. Commission can request decrease in award during negotiation with CNCS.

Legal Applicant: LearningWorks

Program Name: AIMS HIGH

Category: ☐ AC Formula
☒ AC Competitive
☐ Other Competition

Type: ☐ Planning
☒ Operating
☐ Fixed Price
☐ Ed Award Only

Year in Grant Cycle: ☐ Year 1 ☐ Year 2 ☒ Year 3

Continuation Dates: Start: 8/15/2018 End: 8/14/2019

New Resources for Continuation: Funds and Slots

	CNCS		Local Share					
Operating	\$ 206,650		295,304					
Member Support	\$266,128		45,753					
Indirect (Admin)	\$ 24,868		60,465					
CNCS Award amount	\$497,646	Total Local Share (cash + in-kind)		\$401,522				
% sharing proposed	55%		45%					
% share required	60%		40%					
Cost-per-member proposed (max allowed)	\$13,717							
Total AmeriCorps Member Service Years: 36.28		Slot Types Requested						
		FT	HT	RHT	QT	MT		Total
	Slots With living allowance	5	38					43
	Slots with only ed award					58		58

Program Description (executive summary):

LearningWorks has 101 AmeriCorps members who provide extended-day learning and targeted instructional support to students, and coordinate community/family/parent engagement activities in six of the lowest performing elementary schools in Maine as demonstrated by student math and reading proficiency on statewide assessments. Each school served by AIMS HIGH developed a School Improvement Plan using the annual state and national standardized achievement tests scores. This data determined what strategies should be used to ameliorate the challenges in each school. The plans included school-wide and individual interventions shown to improve academic performance.

AIMS HIGH members use a Response-to-Intervention (RTI) program model. RTI is defined by the National Center on Response to Intervention as the integration of assessment and intervention within a multi-level prevention system to maximize student achievement and to reduce behavioral problems. With RTI, schools use data to identify students at risk for poor learning outcomes, monitor student progress, provide evidence-based interventions and adjust the intensity and nature of those interventions depending on a student's responsiveness, and identify students with learning disabilities or other disabilities. Individualized RTI intervention plans can include (but are not limited to) targeted instructional support, extended learning opportunities, community engagement, and parent and family engagement.

- Targeted instructional support means AmeriCorps members provide tutoring, coaching, small group interventions, classroom interventions, and other learning supports both in and out of the classroom.
- Extended-day learning means AmeriCorps members assist students before, during and after school, during school vacations, and during the summer break, with a goal of adding 1 to 2.5 hours of extra learning time a week over 40 weeks of the school year and providing 5 weeks of summer programming.
- Community engagement means AmeriCorps members help schools with community outreach, recruiting volunteers and mentors, and coordinating volunteers and mentors who assist students in meeting individual learning goals.
- Parent and family engagement means AmeriCorps members help schools implement the strategy each school has selected. A strategy example is the parent learning academy that regularly holds educational workshops on topics aimed at teaching parents how to best support their children's education and learning.

Service locations (new sites are italicized):

Biddeford Intermediate School (Biddeford, ME), C.K. Burns School (Saco, ME), East End Community School, (Portland, ME), Reiche Elementary School (Portland, ME), and Windham Primary School (Windham, ME)

Performance measures (targets and achievement for prior year; targets proposed for new year):

Note about service activity performance measures, CNCS does not allow the program to include all youth provided academic supports. Therefore, the students who participate in after-school or vacation activities designed to reinforce learning are not included. Also, the students in class when the AmeriCorps members lead or assist with learning cannot be counted. Only those who specifically qualify for and receive Response to Intervention service from members can be reported. The larger target numbers in the performance measures would encompass all students served; the smaller numbers are those qualifying for RTI and receiving the intervention.

*CNCS did not permit the program to modify targets in its grant system after the award but agreed to the program's negotiated targets noted below that reference only the subset of students. The data below presents both the original and negotiated because the original remain in the official federal grant system.

SERVICE ACTIVITIES

OUTPUT: ED1. Number of students who start in a CNCS supported education program

Target: 2795 (*Negotiated target: 300)// Actual accomplished: 269 // 90% of negotiated target
Proposed target: 300

OUTPUT: ED2. Number of students completing a CNCS-supported education program.

Target: 1900 (*Negotiated target: 270) // Actual accomplished: 252 // 93% of negotiated target

OUTCOME: ED5. Number of students with improved academic performance in literacy and/or math.
Improvement defined as one year of growth.

Target: 1520 (*Negotiated target: 228) // Actual accomplished: 157 // 69% of negotiated target

CAPACITY BUILDING

OUTPUT: Number of schools that develop plans to increase the number of effective management practices in use

Target: 5 // Actual accomplished: 5 // 100% of target

OUTCOME: Number of schools increase the number and quality of essential management practices implemented

Target: 5 // Actual accomplished: 6 // 120% of target

Operating performance summary:

Enrollment/retention.

Year ending 9/30/2017	Total MSYs	Total slots	1700 hr	900 hr	675 hr	450 hr	300 hr
Original Award		102	4	40			58
Enrollment to-date		41	4	12			25
% of enrollment		40.2%	100%	30%			43.1%
Exited before service term complete		15	2	3			10
Retention rate (%)		63.4%					

Year-to-date 12/28/2017	Total MSYs	Total slots	1700 hr	900 hr	675 hr	450 hr	300 hr
Original Award	36.3	99	7	34			58
Enrollment to-date		44	7	19			18
% of enrollment		44.4%	100%	55%			31%
Exited before service term complete		6	2	3			1
Retention rate (%)		86.4%					

Compliance:

» Program operation

A monitoring site visit was conducted by the Grants Officer during summer 2017. All programmatic requirements were reviewed and found to be compliant.

» Member management

The monitoring review looked at all member files. One instance of noncompliance was discovered and it had to do with documentation of a member's eligibility and service. This was a file that was shredded before being digitized in the agency conversion from hard copy to electronic files. The program was able to reconstruct most of the documentation and repaid the \$500 disallowance to CNCS within a month of being assessed the fine.

A serious weakness in documentation of accompaniment was identified. Six records of accompaniment were found to have verification signatures from the accompanier that were anywhere from three to six months later than the events. This is a serious weakness in procedure even though the time logs have details about who accompanied the member, where the member was, what activity they were doing, and member as well as supervisor signatures were affixed during the expected week. (Accompaniment is required when the member starts service before the criminal history background check results are received. There are specific rules about "eyes on" at all times by someone who has been cleared. The person accompanying the member does not have to be the supervisor.)

The program director revised the training for members to highlight the need for same-time documentation. In addition, the Commission added corrective actions to be taken. These are 1) The AmeriCorps program director is instructed to develop a procedure that connects submission of accompaniment forms to approval of time logs in such a way that time logs are not approved if signatures and forms are not correct. The procedure is to be implemented immediately because the program has part-time members with access to vulnerable populations. 2) All staff, including site coordinators, must complete the CNCS online training for National Service Criminal History Background Checks by December 31 and submit evidence of completion with the quarterly report due in January.

The Commission also recommended the program look at the recruitment and selection time frame to see what can be done to complete background checks before or very soon after members start service. In Programs with high compliance, the onboarding starts well before the first day of member service and result in few instances where accompaniment is required. The fewer members needing accompaniment, the less opportunity for noncompliance with a process which is very detailed and specific.

Sponsor and program issues.

AIMS HIGH is in an agency that experienced its third change in leadership during the last AC program year. While the installation of a new Exec Director was planned (the interim had specific tasks to accomplish including helping the board select new leadership), the change still impacted staff support and understanding of the grant. In addition to the Exec, there was turnover in the financial office and a complete change of the AmeriCorps program leadership. The new AC director started in the position in July and the program coordinator will start during December 2017. Because the new director was a site supervisor, her move to leading the program meant there was a change in a site coordinator as well. That position was filled before the school year began.

This AmeriCorps program works in two school districts served by SySTEM REAL AmeriCorps; however, it is not in the same buildings and does not provide any of the same services. The continuation proposal does not change the partner schools which should be considered a strength. If continued, this would mean those schools had three consistent years of the same AmeriCorps programming.

Financial.

Among the many changes in personnel at the grantee organization was a change in the fiscal staff. The new person attended MCCS training for personnel with grant financial responsibilities and has had only minor difficulties with reports. The person is very responsive and worked closely with MCCS to sort out a problem in financial reports that was over 10 months old. The corrections were made in all 10 reports within 24 hours.

In the year completed, the program used 70% of its AmeriCorps award. Of the \$148,590 unused, \$139,024 is on the lines for stipends and benefits so it is directly attributable to under-enrollment.

On a positive note, LearningWorks secured a federal indirect cost rate which helps streamline the amount of documentation needed and clarifies the amount of indirect that can be claimed on the grant. In addition, the program slightly exceeded its match for the 2016-2017 year (2% higher).

The proposed sources of income for the application under consideration are specific and committed. The sponsoring organization is contributing \$150,540 in cash and participating schools are contributing in-kind supervision, space, member training, etc. valued at \$249,752. This approach for grantee share enables school participation by not requiring a partner cash payment from the schools.

Task Force Review Comments:

- Still have same enrollment issue. Program needs to show MCCS that recruitment will yield 100% enrollment. Enrollment this year is ahead of last year but still concerning. Want to know how they will be reaching full enrollment with 450 terms.
- Program needs to be put on notice that funding and slots will be reduced if enrollment is still poor.
- Must establish community advisory committee as required by regulation.
- Need to complete corrective actions on time.
- Need to return attention to engaging volunteers and meet/set targets for capacity-building. Current efforts are not acceptable.
- While the performance of this program in the first year was not impressive, and the turnover in key personnel is problematic, it seems like the program has a plan to move forward and I will be interested in reading their next report and looking to see more careful bookkeeping and consistent leadership as well as positive outcome for students. At this point I would recommend continuation.
- Add a performance measure that will let them capture the students benefitting from out-of-classroom programming led by AmeriCorps. This would give the full picture of the effort.

Task Force Continuation Recommendation	Authorize Proposal	Modify: Increase	Modify: Decrease	Deny Request
Budget	X			
Volunteers/participants	X			
Performance targets	X			
Operating plans	X			